

Book Notices

From Mountain Man to Millionaire: The "Bold and Dashing Life" of Robert Campbell, by William R. Nester. Missouri Biography Series. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999. xi, 270 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer David L. Ferch is professor of history and special collections librarian at Sierra College, where he specializes in the history of the frontier and nineteenth-century social history.

William Nester offers a nicely crafted biography of nineteenth-century Missouri entrepreneur, banker, and philanthropist Robert Campbell. Irish born and devoutly Presbyterian, the youthful Campbell brokered a colorful life on the upper Missouri fur frontier of the 1820s into a highly successful business career in bustling antebellum St. Louis. Unwavering business acumen coupled with a deserved reputation for dead-center honesty ensured Campbell a succession of investment triumphs despite the era's cutthroat business climate, boom and bust economic cycles, and soft-money credit practices. Indeed, Campbell's evolving business ventures reflect a virtual life-course "blueprint" of the successful frontier entrepreneur, with his pelt and robe partnerships of the 1830s and 1840s expanding into mercantile, provisioning, and banking endeavors, and culminating in mid-century investments in steamboats, railroads, and real estate. Not surprisingly, his prodigious accumulation of wealth gained Campbell access to the highest levels of Missouri state politics as well as lucrative government contracts in the Indian trade.

Nester's biography of Campbell is a fine model for those interested in researching and writing nineteenth-century business biographies. The author seldom loses sight of his subject when presenting the era's broader business, economic, and political issues. And he tells Campbell's largely compelling life story clearly and "close to the vest," thereby avoiding the flights of speculation that often mar biographies of lesser-known historical figures. Finally, those interested in the fur trade will appreciate Nester's biography, as it sheds much useful light on Campbell's close associations with William Ashley and William Sublette, among others.

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